1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria

Chapter XV

Birth and Childhood

A. Hill Marias

No Marias are unaware of the causal connexion between intercourse and pregnancy, and all women know when they miss their first menstruation that they are probably starting to bear a child. Pregnancy among Hill Marias is attended by no taboo either for man or wife, so far as I could ascertain, and the wife continues performing her ordinary routine work right up to the last day of her pregnancy. Sexual intercourse, however, ceases as soon as pregnancy is known to have begun.

During ordinary menstruation, as we have seen in Chapter VI, the wife, like all young women, is secluded for five or six days either in the communal menstruation hut, or in the *kala* or menstruation room or the separate menstruation hut of the house. The menstruation huts, whether communal or private, are known as *pedawo'gha'i*, or (in the south of the Abujhmar hills) as *dola-lon*, or (in the extreme north) as *kurma-lon*. The term *pedawo'gha'i* is applied also sometimes to the *kala* room in the houses. These huts and rooms have been described already on pages 104-6. The Hill Marias say that their clan-god and their Departed would be angry if they gave up their immemorial custom of secluding their women during menstruation, and that no man should see a woman's face at such a time; we have seen that they often guard against the magic of women in this condition by placing castor oil plants and seeds on the roof of the hut when it is occupied. The men do not seem to have any clear idea of what happens to a woman at such times; they only know and say that she 'has gone *pedawo'gha'i*'. There is no ceremony of any kind at a girl's first menstruation, or during pregnancy. Though children are generally born in the menstruation room or hut, and for some time after birth the mother has to live there subject to the same prohibitions as during menstruation, yet during her nine months she is free from the ordinary taboos to which she is subject during menstruation; that is to say, she is free to visit her husband in the fields and to cook his food for him, in fact to do all her ordinary household and field or market tasks. But it is taboo for a pregnant woman to pick or break anything growing. There may possibly be certain prohibitions which I did not discover.

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I do not in any way emphasize it, but it seems to me curious that many crimes connected with sorcery are associated with water; they are performed on the banks of ponds or rivers and in several instances the body has been thrown into the water afterwards. Does a murderer who has killed a sorcerer believe that there is some spiritual antiseptic for him in throwing his victim's body into water?

IV

841 Grigson has studied in detail the custom of the Hill Marias in regard to menstruation, pregnancy and birth, but his notes on the Bison-horn Marias need, as he says, 'considerable supplementing'. The Bison-horn Marias have the curious belief that men, not women, were originally subject to a menstrual period. They used to tie hollow bamboos to their organs to catch the discharge. Once—according to one legend—a girl was laughing at a man in this distressing and inconvenient condition, and he lost his temper and threw the bamboo at her; in another story a sister wanted to help her brother, who could not cut his clearing properly on account of the bamboo tagged on in front of him, and offered to take it instead.

841 826 Yet other legends ascribe the origin of menstruation to a wound. There were formerly teeth in the vagina and when these were removed, the wound was not wholly healed. Once the vagina was in the crick of the leg behind the knee—you can still see its shape—but a hen pecked at it and the frightened organ jumped for safety to its hiding-place between the thighs. But it was hurt and it still bleeds every month at the recollection.

841 All the Gond tribes are very strict about the menstrual taboos, in this contrasting sharply with the Orissa Bondos, Gadabas, and Saoras, who are at a similar stage of culture and live not very far away. Grigson has described the extreme rigorism of the Hill Marias and has rightly suggested that the Bison-horn Marias are somewhat less apprehensive of the dangers of menstruation. But they too, like the Murias and the Gonds generally, are strict enough in their application of the taboo and breach of it may be punished by the Departed through the bite of a snake or the destruction of the harvest. They do not usually build special menstruation huts, but sometimes where there is a girls' dormitory, menstruating women sleep on one side of the hut and unmarried girls on the other. In such villages, no married woman may go near the dormitory nor should youths enter it. Not all dormitories however are used in this way.

841 881 Elsewhere part of the veranda of the ordinary living-house is screened off or a little hut is built in the compound for the use of

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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a woman at this time. At the menarche (for which the word used is *kumor utta*, 'the blossoming of the flower'), however, a special hut is built for the girl by women outside the village. A woman of the household brings her food and sleeps with her at night; she must bathe whenever she returns to the house. In some villages, the Marias still make a platform up a tree for the girl, who during the day must hide herself in the forest.

It is very dangerous for anyone to see, let alone to touch, a girl at her menarche. At Tikanpal I was told that if a man saw such a girl as he went through the jungle he should slap her and then go to her parents and after rebuking them, demand a fowl which he should sacrifice; then he should bathe and anoint himself with oil. At Gadapal they said that a man should throw a lump of earth between his legs at the girl, or a stick over his shoulder, and then go home and bathe. Neglect of these precautions might lead to blindness.

At the end of the period—all this refers only to the first period—the girl destroys her hut or platform during the night, throws away her cloth,[1] bathes and returns home before cockcrow. In some villages she is expected to remain for a day or two longer on the veranda of her house: if she has a married elder brother, it is the special duty of his wife to attend to her. Then she puts oil and turmeric on her body—an act which is said to symbolize her formal re-admission into caste, for during the previous days she has been regarded as excommunicated. In many Maria villages, however, the ceremonial use of turmeric is still unknown, and the elder brother's wife carries a pot of water round the house and sprinkles everyone saying, 'Now you are back again in caste'. After this the girl fetches water in an earthen pot and cowdungs the floor. In the evening her father invites some of the elders to a bottle of liquor and says, 'My daughter who was unclean all these days is now clean again'. He sacrifices a fowl to the Departed and they feast on its flesh.

There is not nearly so much fuss about the later periods. The woman has to keep out of the way, but there is no danger in looking at her, and when it is over she just has a bath and resumes her ordinary duties. But even so her daily programme is considerably disturbed. She must not sleep inside the house and, of course, sexual intercourse is strictly forbidden. She must not cook or fetch water or go to work in the fields. She must not touch cattle, pigs

[1] There do not seem to be any special taboos associated with this cloth. But the leaf-cups from which the girl eats at this time are charged with magical potency and if a witch can get hold of them she can afflict the girl with palsy.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

III. The Life of Young Children

In youth the spider's web is the sky.—Muria proverb

[853] Muria babies, who are suckled for at least two years and then often weaned at the Jata Pandum, seem to be happy and contented. The Muria are good parents, proud of their children, tolerant towards them in many ways, anxious to teach them things, delighted as they see them grow. 'When a young child walks for the first time, the earth trembles for two-and-a-half days.' But directly a child is old enough to play, he is regarded as old enough to work. The early stage of 'eating while playing and playing while eating' is soon over and the little girls and boys have to take their share of the work of the house. Tiny girls may often be seen staggering about with the youngest baby in their arms or helping their mothers to cow-dung the house. Sometimes you may see a line of boys and girls following their elders back from the jungle, each with a tiny basket of fruit or a minute bundle of leaves on their heads. During this period the children are very dependent on their parents and go everywhere with them. A boy takes his little axe and follows his father to the jungle. A girl takes a pot and goes with her mother to the well.

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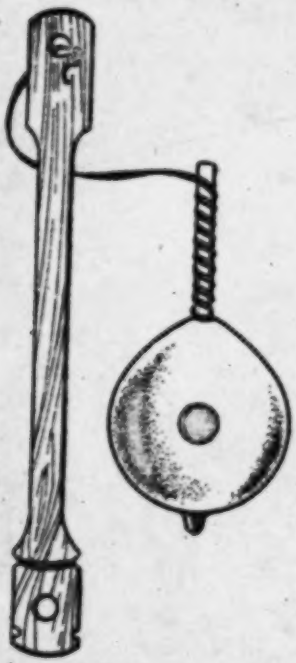

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[524]

Fig. 16. Spinning-top
Length of upright wooden stick, 8¾"

It is now that the parents, and especially the fathers, enjoy the happiest relations with their children. You may often see a father carrying his baby son to the ghotul and sleeping with him there, or taking him to a festival, sometimes even encouraging him to dance as a medium before the clan-god. The father may give a boy a tiny drum or axe, toys that are just like the real thing, or he may make his children little wooden carts or ploughs.

857 From an early age, however, the children begin going to the ghotul in the evenings and sharing as much as they possibly can in the life of the older boys and girls. The whole trend of Muria society is directed towards transferring the parent-child relation into the ghotul-child relation, and the little boy or girl soon finds the Sirdar and Belosa taking the place of father and mother.

●881 The growth of a boy and girl towards maturity is not marked by any special ceremonies: there are no initiatory rites. But for a girl there are two notable occasions which deeply influence her life during this period. The first of these is the painful experience of being tattooed, the second is the onset of menstruation. To a consideration of these we will now turn.

IV. Tattooing

304 The day when she is tattooed is an important moment in the life of a young Muria girl, a real step towards maturity. It is generally considered desirable

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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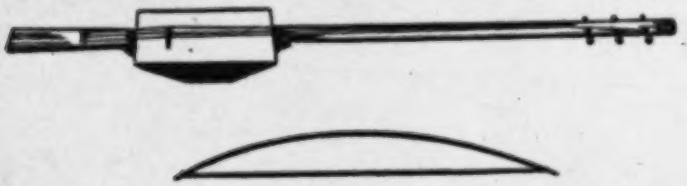
Bison Horn Maria

534 bamboo and the usual flute. They are fond of gongs, but these are not now so common as they were. At the great Pen Karsita at Ghotpal in 1942, the dancers used slabs of



Kikir Fiddle
(*Length 2'*)

coloured wood, bits of old tin and indeed anything that would make a noise instead of the traditional gongs. Like the Muria, at festivals and even for amusement the Maria use a hunting horn, either a real horn or one made of brass.

541 Besides dancing, the chief Maria relaxation is the cock-fight. At the conclusion of all the bigger bazaars, the men retire to a grove of trees and set their cocks against each other. The cocks are armed with sharp and deadly little knives tied to their feet and fights are to the death. The victor has the privilege of taking the defeated bird, but the real excitement comes from the betting.

V

844 [843] The ceremonies attending birth and marriage are very simple. The pregnant mother is not hampered by many restrictions on her movements. After the birth of the child the placenta is buried in a pit behind the house. Logs are placed above it and the arrow with which the cord was cut is driven into the ground near by. A small shed is made and the 846 mother lives here for some weeks with her child, taking a daily bath above the placenta-pit. At the end of this period of segregation, the husband gives a feast to the neighbours, [551] the child is named and the mother is permitted to return to her household duties. It was to such a feast that the unhappy victim of the Mardum sacrifice was enticed.[1]

881 There are no ceremonies of initiation at puberty, though a

[1] Case No 21.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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girl's first menstruation is marked by special rites of purification. There is little conscious education of the young who grow up in natural freedom and learn by imitation. Marriage is generally adult, but is arranged by the parents and the cross-cousin marriage is common. Betrothal ceremonies are simple. The boy's father goes with gifts and a traditional formula is used—'We have heard there is a flower growing in your garden. We have come to pluck it and put it in our hair'. If a boy's family cannot afford the bride-price required, they may send him to serve as a Lamhada in the house of his future wife. His period of service is for three or five years, and the marriage is often celebrated before it is complete. Marriage by capture, which was probably the traditional method, has not yet died out, and occasionally there is a case of the reverse tradition when a girl comes as a Paitu and forces herself upon a man who is bound to marry her. Widow-remarriage is permitted and indeed enjoined, the husband's younger brother having the first claim on the person and property of the widow. Divorce is rare but is available to either husband or wife. The wife usually achieves it by eloping with another man and the husband in most cases accepts a *fait accompli*.

The actual marriage ceremony is also simple. There is no annointing with turmeric or oil, no perambulation of the sacred pole. Customs vary from place to place, but the traditional marriage has probably only three elements—a celebration which includes feasting, drinking and dancing, the pouring of water from the roof of a house or shed onto the bridal pair and the ceremonial consummmation of the marriage at which bride and bridegroom are forcibly shut up in a room together.

VI

Funeral ceremonies are more elaborate, and since this book is concerned with death, we will consider them in greater detail.

Maria thinking about the destiny and state of the soul after death is as confused as that of more sophisticated people. At least three contradictory views of the subject are held at the same time. I think that the oldest and characteristically